

## The Trend in Finance

### Railroads' Policy of Wage Cuts Focuses Attention on Shrinking Earnings and Induces Selling of Stocks

THE new dilemma of the railroads was dramatized last week by the announcement of important companies in the East and the West that they purposed to find a way out by reducing wages. For many weeks the dry statistics have been quietly telling the story of trouble in the field of transportation finances, but the seriousness of the situation did not impress stock market speculators until the roads themselves focused attention on the situation by referring to their program for the liquidation of labor.

Railroad executives now feel the need of doing simultaneously three things which they had originally planned to do separately. They had hoped first to scrap the national agreements as to working conditions which were adopted during the régime of the railroad administration. The management of the roads contend these agreements make for inefficiency. Having eliminated these obstacles, the executives next hoped to readjust downward the wages of unskilled labor. And then, lastly, they desired to reduce the compensation in dollars of skilled workers, but felt that, since theirs had not risen in proportion to the unskilled, it was only fair to postpone reductions. But in a hurry to get quick action on the preliminary program as a result of the attitude of the men and the force of shrinking earnings has driven the directing minds of the roads to the conclusion that it is now necessary to cut through the entire scheme of liquidation of labor at once. The executives estimate that 60 cents out of every dollar they spend goes to labor, and, in the attempt to slash expenditures, they feel that labor must necessarily be affected. Other parts of the economy policy involve deferment of new construction, a hand-to-mouth policy in regard to purchase of equipment, coal conservation, better loading and other technical matters.

Of course, if the railroads should escape from the present view of high costs and shrinking income by means of wage cuts the result will be favorable in a strictly financial sense. However, the focusing of attention on the plight of roads received a bearish interpretation among speculators, who evidently were expressing their fear that the unions and the Railroad Labor Board were likely to thwart the deflationist efforts of the railroad managers. The heavy selling toward the close of the week of railroad stocks represented selling by those who preferred to be out of the market during the critical period of adjustment that looms ahead, as well as heavy short selling and liquidation by disappointed speculators for the rise.

The concentration of attention on the marked degree to which the railroads are failing to earn the 6 per cent on their property valuation which the transportation act of 1920 describes as a fair return accomplished in the stock market what important international news failed to do. It succeeded in rousing the stock market from its career of sleeping sickness, in which only the encounters among professional speculators preserved the continuity of the market. In spite of the failure of the Allies and the Germans to agree on reparations at the London conference, the reported revolt in Russia and the assassination in Spain, the market remained listless and inactive until toward the middle of the week, when attention was focused on the difficulties of the railroads.

The troubles of the railroads are interwoven with those of industry. The recession in trade has decreased the volume of freight offered to the roads. Both the railroads and industry are in the midst of the same process of readjustment to after-the-war conditions. It is not surprising, therefore, that weakness in the rails was followed by heavy selling of the industrials. The pressure was largely of professional origin at first, but it succeeded later in causing real liquidation. Some of the selling very evidently was by those in quest of cash with which to pay the first instalment of their Federal taxes to-morrow. By Friday night the averages of both industrial and railroad

stocks were at the lowest level touched thus far in 1921.

Even though the financial markets chose almost to ignore the effects of the failure to reach an agreement last week at the London conference on reparations, the event is of real significance. It is too early to give a final estimate as to the meaning of the failure at London, because the outcome of the working out of the penalties imposed by the Allies still remains in doubt. The invasion will hardly be likely to help the economic position of the Allies much, unless it serves as an argument that will convince the Germans to accept the Allied terms.

The more discerning bankers recognized that a failure to agree on reparations might mean an indefinite prolongation of the factors of uncertainty which have been tending to paralyze European trade and finance. The view was expressed before the conference that any agreement in the matter of fixing Germany's war bill would come to Europe as the zephyrus of spring.

Although the foreign exchange market was rather active last week, the net change was not so large as might have been expected under the circumstances. The announcement on Monday that the Allies had arrived at a decision to advance the military occupation of Germany had a depressing influence Tuesday and demand sterling dropped sharply, but recovered to some extent before the end of the day. The upward movement was continued Wednesday and Thursday, but quotations were slightly easier Friday and the net change at the end of the week was small.

The proximity of the middle of the month, when heavy shifting of banking funds will take place in connection with the Federal tax payments and United States Treasury operations, has failed to cause any marked change in the money market so far as surface conditions go. The Wall Street credit mart has remained stabilized during the last week, with rates at 7 per cent for call loans. Commercial borrowers continued to pay 7 1/2 to 8 per cent for accommodation. The turnover of banking funds on March 15 will run into large figures, although the total transactions will not be as huge as on December 15, the previous tax payment date. Estimates of the tax payments vary, but it is not believed the total for the country at large will exceed \$400,000,000. Treasury operations on the 15th involve the maturity of \$500,000,000 in certificates of indebtedness. On the same date a new issue of \$400,000,000 certificates will be made. Indications are that these transactions will be put through with a minimum degree of disturbance in the money market.

The paucity of new offerings is the most striking feature of the investment market. No signs of improvement appeared last week, and bankers who are engaged in distribution of investment securities saw little indication of betterment in the near future, although it was considered possible that easier money conditions after the middle of the month might result in a more confident tone. Outstanding issues have suffered from general market conditions, railroad bonds in particular. Foreign government issues have generally yielded in the face of the European developments.

#### Financial Item

The National City Bank of New York, trustee, has invited tenders for the sinking fund of the Hershey Chocolate Corporation first 10% per cent ten-year sinking fund gold bonds, offerings to be received until 10 a. m. to-day.

## Transactions Last Week in Listed Stocks

### Summary of Stock Exchange Dealings

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Stocks	Week before	Year ago	1921	1920	1919
Railroad stocks	736,500	376,700	803,700	8,606,300	14,561,400
Industrial stocks	2,916,300	2,254,100	5,832,800	24,149,000	39,119,700
All stocks	3,652,800	2,630,800	6,636,500	32,755,300	53,681,100
U. S. government bonds	1,419,000	1,419,000	1,419,000	1,419,000	1,419,000
Other bonds	11,499,000	9,621,000	16,182,000	103,294,000	121,411,000
All bonds	12,918,000	11,040,000	17,601,000	104,713,000	122,830,000

High		Low		Div.					Net
1921.	Date.	1921.	Date.	in \$.		Sales.	High.	Low.	Close.
36	Jan 28	26 1/2	Jan 3	—	Adams Express ....	200	28 1/2	28 1/2	34 1/2
163 1/2	Jan 27	16 1/2	Jan 3	—	Advance Bonds .....	600	42 1/2	42 1/2	48 1/2